

Marriage in the Bible

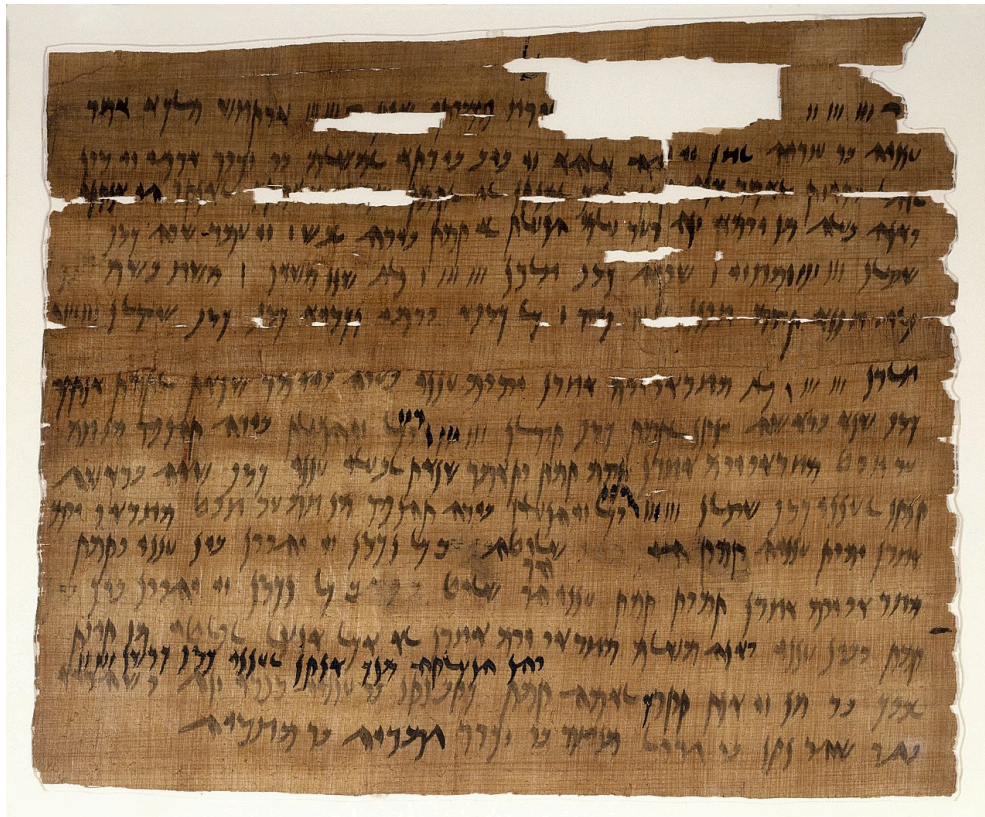
Genesis 2:24 - A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Marriage is a sacred, lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, established by God as a union where they "become one flesh". While specific rituals varied, the core elements were a public, consensual commitment and the act of leaving one's parents to be joined with a spouse.

Even though the world has tried to change the definition, marriage is an institution of God, not an institution of the state. In the O.T., there was a legal document back then, but the man and woman making the covenant before God and the families recognizing their bond was. Marriage was a two-step process of betrothal and wedding, with arrangements often made by parents for the benefit of the families, and it was legally binding. The process has multiple parallels shown in God's relationship with His people, and His promises for us.

The parents decided on a mate for their son. Even though they would be "one flesh" they would be under the **authority of the groom's father**. The parents chose the bride because she would be coming into the family and working alongside her future mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. Sometimes the parents consulted with their children to see if they approved of the choice of mates being made for them. For example, Rebekah was asked if she wanted to marry Isaac (Gen. 24:57-58). They did not marry the person they loved; they loved the mate they married. Love began at marriage. When Isaac married Rebekah, the Bible records that "she became his wife, and he loved her" (Gen. 24:61-67).

Betrothal



Marriage document of Ananiah and Tamut, written in Aramaic, July 3, 449 B.C.E., [Brooklyn Museum](#)

- The first step, the betrothal (Erusin), often lasted about a year, where a contract (Ketubah) was agreed upon and a bride price was exchanged.
- Contrary to the practice of many other cultures, in which the bride's father would pay the groom's family a dowry, in Jewish culture the groom's father paid a bride price, or *mohar*, to the bride's family in order to negotiate the betrothal and, in essence, "purchase" the bride.
- This didn't have to be money, it could've been property or service. Usually the bride's father gave the entirety of the mohar to the bride. For example, Jacob agreed to work for seven years for Rachel in order to marry her (Gen. 29:18-20).
- Both parties and witnesses to the betrothal would then sign the *ketubah*.
 - Once signed, the only way out of the contract was with a divorce. We see this when Joseph was considering this after finding out Mary was pregnant with Jesus (Matthew 1:18–19) before an angel visited him.
 - As a betrothed couple, Mary and Joseph were essentially husband and wife, and they later married (verse 24), although they did not consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born (verse 25).
- Once completed, the groom would then prepare a place for the bride in his parents house. Usually this took a year depending on the length established by the groom's father. (strong parallel to John 14:3 NET, "And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too.")

- Procession

- The groom with his friends dressed in fine clothes would then come back for his bride. The bride **would not know the day or hour of her husband-to-be's return**, so the groom's arrival was usually announced with a trumpet call and a shout so the bride had some forewarning.
- Virgins of Israel would wait outside with their oil lamps until they heard a loud cry from the groom to join him in the procession to the bride's home (Parable of the ten virgins - Matthew 25:1–13).
- Before the night of the procession, the groom would assign one of his friends to assist the bride during the betrothal period. Once the friend heard the groom's voice during the procession, he knew his assignment was finished.
 - i. John 3:29 describes John the Baptist as the friend of the bridegroom since he was preparing the world for Jesus coming and rejoiced hearing Jesus was teaching.
- The bride would be bathed, purified, perfumed, clothed and adorned with jewels and a veil covering her face when the procession got to her, and was carried on furniture from her house to the groom's home.



Bible History Online

Ceremony (Nissuin)

- Once brought back to the home\bridal chamber the groom prepared, they would perform the Sheva Brachot under a canopy called a Huppah outside. It represents God's presence over the ceremony\couple's home and signifying the couple's home being open to love and community.



- Sheva Brachot - These are the seven blessings stated under the canopy and are repeated during the week and before the feast.
 - i. Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.
 - ii. Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who created everything for His glory.
 - iii. Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who created humanity.
 - iv. Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who created humanity in His image, in the image of the likeness of his form, and made for them an everlasting establishment. Blessed are you, Lord, who created humanity.
 - v. May the barren one (Jerusalem) rejoice greatly and delight in the ingathering of her children within her in joy. Blessed are you Lord who causes Zion to rejoice with her children.

- vi. The loving partners shall rejoice as You caused your creatures to delight in the Garden of Eden of old. Blessed are you Lord who causes the groom and bride to rejoice.
- vii. Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates happiness and joy, groom and bride. Exultation, delight, amusement, and pleasure, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. Soon, Lord our God, may the sound of happiness and the sound of joy and the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem — the rejoicing of the groom from their huppahs and youths from their singing banquets. Blessed are you Lord who makes the groom rejoice with the bride
- They would then go to a room, the bride would remove her veil and they would consummate the marriage as guests waited outside (Yihud). They would place a bloodstained garment out the window of the room, signifying that she was a virgin.
- Nowadays the couple is placed in a separate room to signify their consummation, have their first kiss or first meal if they have been fasting before they go back to the guests for the feast.
- Once completed, the wedding feast would begin and usually last a week. (Gen. 29:21-28 Jacob with Leah and Rachel, Samson with the Timnah woman in Judges 14.).
- Breaking the glass - In modern times, the groom or both the bride and groom would break a glass signifying the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Covenant

- We may not have an exact example of what was said in the Ketubahs, but we know of the responsibilities for each party:
 - For the Men:
 - It is a promise to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25)
 - It is a promise to live sacrificially for his wife (Eph. 5:25)
 - It is to lead his wife spiritually (Ephesians 5:26)
 - It is to leave his parents and cleave alone to his wife (Ephesians 5:31)
 - It is a promise of monogamy (I Corinthians 7, Hebrews 13:4)
 - For the Woman:
 - It is a promise to joyfully submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22)
 - It is a promise to respect her husband (Ephesians 5:31)
 - It is a promise of monogamy (I Corinthians 7, Hebrews 13:4)

God used the customs as a metaphor for his relationship with the church. In the same way, we must continue preparing, and purifying ourselves for his eventual return.

References

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